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WU WEI.

A PHANTASY

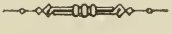
BASED ON THE PHILOSOPHY OF LAO-TSE.

FROM THE DUTCH

OF

HENRI BOREL.

AUTHORISED VERSION BY MEREDITH IANSON.



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AUTHOR'S PREFACE.

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The following study on Lao-Tse's "Wu-Wei" should by no means be regarded as a translation or even as a free rendering of the actual work of that philosopher. I have simply endeavoured to retain in my work the essence of his wisdom in all its purity, and I have given a direct translation of his essential truths in isolated instances only, the rest being for the most part a self-thought-out elaboration of the few principles enunciated by him.

My conception of the terms "Tao" and "Wu-Wei" is entirely different from that of most sinologues (such as Stanislas Julien, Giles, and Legge), who have translated the work "Tao-Teh-King". But this is not the place to justify myself. It may best be judged from the following work whether my conception be wisdom or foolishness.

But little is contained in Lao-Tse's short, extremely simple book, the words of which may be said to be condensed into their purely primary signifiance — a significance at times quite at variance

with that given in other works to the same words *) — but this little is gospel. Lao-Tse's work is no treatise on philosophy, but contains, rather, merely those truths to which this (unwritten) philosophy had led him. In it we find no form nor embodiment, nothing but the quintessence of this philosophy.

My work is permeated with this essence, but it is no translation of Lao-Tse. None of my metaphorical comparisons, such as that with the landscape, with the sea, with the clouds, are anywhere to be found in Lao-Tse's work. Neither has he anywhere spoken of Art, nor specially of Love. In writing of all this I have spoken aloud the thoughts and feelings instinctively induced by the perusal of Lao-Tse's deep-felt philosophy. Thus it may be that my work contains far more of myself than I am conscious of; but even so, it is but an outpouring of the thought and feeling called up in me by the words of Lao-Tse.

I have made use of none but *Chinese* works on Lao-Tse, and of those only a few. On reading later some of the English and French translations, I was amazed to find how confused and unintelligible these books were.

I adhered to my simple idea of Lao-Tse's work, and of my work I could alter nothing, for I felt the truth of it within me as a simple and natural faith.

*) By Confucius, for instance.

HENRI BOREL.

I.

TAO.

The numbers in the text refer to notes by the author, which will be found at the end of the book.

M. I.

I.

TAO.

I was in the Temple of Shien Shan, on an islet in the Chinese Sea, distant a few hours' journey from the harbour of Hā Tó.

To the westward rise softly two mountain-ranges, blending behind the island their gentle contours. To the eastward shimmers the endless Ocean. High up, rock-supported, stands the Temple, in the shadow of broad Buddha-trees.

The island is but little visited. Sometimes fisher-folk, fleeing before the threatening typhoon, anchor there when they have no further hope of reaching the harbour. Why the Temple stands there, on this lonely spot, no-one knows; but the lapse of centuries has established its holy right to stand there. Strangers arrive but seldom, and there are but a hundred poor inhabitants, or thereabouts, who live there simply because their ancestors did so before them. I had gone thither in the hope of finding some man of earnest temperament with whom to

study. I had explored the Temples and convents of the neighbourhood for more than a year, in search of serious-minded priests who might be capable of telling me what I was unable to deduce from the superficial books on Chinese religion; but I found nothing but ignorant, stupid creatures everywhere — kneeling to idols whose symbolical significance they did not understand, and reciting strange "Sutras" not one word of which was intelligible to them[1]. And I had been obliged to draw all my information from badly-translated works that had received even worse treatment at the hands of learned Europeans than at those of the literary Chinese whom I had consulted. At last, however, I had heard an old Chinaman mention "the sage of Shien Shan" as well-versed in the secrets of Heaven and Earth; and — without cherishing any great expectations, it is true — I had crossed the water to seek him out.

This Temple resembled many others that I had seen. Grimy priests lounged on the steps in dirty-grey garments, and looked at me with senseless grins. The figures of "Kwan Yin" and "Cakyamuni" and "Sam-Pao-Fu" had been newly restored, and blazed with all imaginable crude colours that completely marred their former beauty. The floor was covered with dirt and dust, and pieces of orange-peel and sugarcane were strewn about. A thick and heavy atmosphere oppressed my breast.

Addressing one of the priests, I said:

"I have come to visit the old sage. Does not an old sage dwell here, called after 'Lao-Tse'?"

With a wondering face he answered me:

"Lao-Tse lives in the top-most hut upon the cliffs. But he does not like barbarians."

I asked him quietly:

"Will you take me to him, Bikshu, for a dollar?"

There was greed in his glance, but he shook his head, saying:

"I dare not; seek him thyself."

The other priests grinned, and offered me tea, in the hope of 'tips'. —

I left them, and climbed the rocks, reaching the top in half-an-hour; and there I found a little square stone hut. I knocked at the door, and shortly after heard someone draw back a bolt.

There stood the sage, looking at me.

And it was a revelation.

It was as though I saw a great light — a light not dazzling, but calming.

He stood before me tall and straight as a palm-tree. His countenance was peaceful as is a calm evening, in the hush of the trees, and the still moonlight; his whole person breathed the majesty of nature, as simply-beautiful, as purely spontaneous, as a mountain or a cloud. His presence diffused an atmosphere holy as the prayerful soul pervading the soft after-gleam on a twilit landscape. — I felt uneasy under his deep gaze, and saw my poor life revealed in all its pettiness. I could not say a

word, but felt in silence his illuminating influence.

He raised his hand with a gesture like the movement of a swaying flower, and held it out to me — heartily — frankly. — He spoke, and his voice was gentle music, like the sound of the wind in the trees: —

"Welcome, stranger! What dost thou seek of me? — old man that I am!"

"I come to seek a master," I answered humbly; — "to find such guidance as may render me a good man. I have long searched this beautiful land, but the people seem as though they were dead, and I am still as poor as ever."

"Thou errest somewhat in this matter," said the sage. "Strive thou not so busily to be so very good. Do not seek it over much, or thou wilt never find the true wisdom. Dost thou not know how it was that the Yellow Emperor[2] recovered his magic pearl? I will tell thee[3].

"The Yellow Emperor was once journeying round the north of the Red Sea, and he climbed to the summit of the Kuenlün mountains. On his return to the southward he lost his magic pearl. He besought his wits to find it, but in vain. He besought his sight to find it, but in vain. He besought his eloquence to find it, but that was also in vain. At last he besought Nothing, and Nothing recovered it. «How extraordinary!" exclaimed the Yellow Emperor "that Nothing should be able to recover it!" Dost thou understand me, young man?"

"I think this pearl was his soul," I answered, "and that knowledge, sight, and speech do but cloud the soul rather than illumine it; and that it was only in the peace of perfect quietude that his soul's consciousness was restored to the Yellow Emperor. Is it so, Master?"

"Quite right; thou hast felt it as it is. And dost thou know, too, whom this beautiful legend is by?"

"I am young and ignorant; I do not know."

"It is by Chuang-Tse, the disciple of Lao-Tse, China's greatest sage. It was neither Confucius nor Mencius who spoke the purest wisdom in this country, but Lao-Tse. He was the greatest, and Chuang-Tse was his apostle. You strangers cherish, I know, a certain wellmeaning admiration for Lao-Tse also, but I think but few of you know that he was the purest human being who ever breathed. — Hast thou read the "Tao-Teh-King?" and hast thou ever considered, I wonder, what he meant by "Tao"?"

"I should consider myself fortunate indeed if thou wouldst tell me, my Master."

"I think I may well instruct thee, young man. It is many years since I have had a pupil, and I see in thine eyes no curiosity, but rather a pure desire of wisdom, for the freeing of thy soul. Listen then[4]. —

"Tao is really nothing but that which you strangers call "God". Tao is the One; the beginning and the end. It embraces all things, and to it all things return.

"Lao-Tse wrote at the commencement of his

book the sign: Tao. But what he actually meant — the Highest, the One — can have no name, can never be expressed in any sound, just because it is the One. Equally inadequate is your term "God". — Wu — Nothing — that is Tao. Thou dost not understand me? — Listen further! There exists, then, an absolute Reality — without beginning, without end — which we cannot comprehend, and which therefore must be to us as Nothing. That which we *are* able to comprehend, which has for us a relative reality, is in truth only appearance. It is an outgrowth, a result of absolute reality, seeing that everything emanates from, and returns to that reality. But things which are real to us are not real in themselves. What we call Being is in fact Not-Being, and just what we call Not-Being is Being in its true sense. So that we are living in a great obscurity. What we imagine to be real is not real, and yet emanates from the real, for the Real is the Whole. Both Being and Not-being are accordingly Tao. But above all never forget that "Tao" is merely a sound uttered by a human being, and that *the idea is essentially inexpressible.* All things appreciable to the senses, and all cravings of the heart are unreal. Tao is the source of Heaven and Earth. One begat Two, two begat Three, Three begat Millions. And Millions return again into One.

"If thou rememberest this well, young man, thou hast passed the first gate-way on the path of Wisdom.

"Thou knowest, then, that Tao is the source of

everything; of the trees, the flowers, and the birds; of the sea, the desert, and the rocks; of light and darkness; of heat and cold; of day and night; of summer and winter; and of thine own life. Worlds and Oceans evaporate in Eternity. Man rises out of the darkness, laughs in the glimmering light, and disappears. But in all these changes the One is manifested. Tao is in everything. Thy soul in her innermost is Tao. —

"Seest thou the world outspread before thee, young man?"...

With a stately gesture he pointed seawards.....

The mountains on either side stood fast, uncompromising, clear-set in the atmosphere — like consolidated thoughts, strong-hewn with conscious energy — dreamily yielding in the distance to the tender influences of light and air. On a very high point stood a lonely little tree, of delicate foliage, in a high light. The evening began to fall, with a tender serenity; and a rosy glow, dreamy yet bright, lent to the blue mountains standing out against it an air of peaceful joyousness. In it all was to be felt a gentle upwardstriving, a still poising, as in the rarefied atmosphere of conscious piety. And the sea crept up slowly, softly, with a still-swaying slide — with the quiet, irresistible approach of a type of infinity. The sail of a little vessel, gleaming softly golden, glided nearer. So tiny it looked on that immense ocean — so fearless and lovely. All was pure — no trace of foulness anywhere.

And I spoke with the rare impulse of a mighty joy:

"I feel it now, O Master! That which I seek is everywhere. I had no need to have sought it in the distance; for it is quite close to me. It is everywhere — what I seek, what I myself am, what my soul is. It is familiar to me as my own self. It is all revelation! God is everywhere! Tao is in everything!"

"That is so, boy, but confuse it not! In that which thou seest is Tao, but Tao is not what thou seest. Thou must not think that Tao is visible to thine eyes. Tao will neither waken joy in thy heart nor draw thy tears. For all thy experiences and emotions are relative and not real.

"However, I will speak no more of that at present. Thou standest as yet but at the first gate, and seest but the first glint of dawn. It is already much that thou shouldst realise Tao as present in everything. It will render thy life more natural and confident — for, believe me, thou liest as safe in the arms of Tao as a child in the arms of its mother. And it will render thee deeply serious, for thou wilt feel thyself to be in all places as holy a thing as is a good priest in his temple. No longer wilt thou be frightened by the changes of things, by life and death; for thou knowest that death, as well as life, emanates from Tao. And it is so simple that Tao, which pervaded thy life, should also after death continually surround thee.

"Look upon the landscape before thee! The trees, the mountains, the sea, they are thy brothers, like the air and the light. Observest thou how the sea is approaching us? So spontaneously, so naturally, so purely "because so it must be." — Seest thou thy dear sister, the little tree on yonder point, bending towards thee? and the simple movement of her little leaves? — Then I will speak to thee of Wu-Wei[5], of "unresistance", of "selfmovement" on the breath of thine impulse as it was born out of Tao. Men would be true men if they would but let their lives flow of themselves, as the sea heaves, as a flower blooms, in the simple beauty of Tao. In every man there is an impulse towards the movement which, proceeding from Tao, would urge him back to Tao again. But men grow blind through their own senses and lusts. They strive for pleasure, desire, hate, fame and riches. Their movements are fierce and stormy, their progress a series of wild uprisings and violent falls. They hold fast to all that is unreal. They desire too many things to allow of their desiring the One. They desire, too, to be wise and good, and that is worst of all. They desire to know too much.

"The one remedy is: the return to the source whence they came. In us is Tao. Tao is rest. Only by renunciation of desire — even the desire for goodness or wisdom — can we attain rest. Oh! all this craving to know what Tao is! And this painful struggle for words in which to express it

and to enquire after it! — The truly wise follow the Teaching which is wordless — which remains unexpressed[6]. And who shall ever express it? Those who know it (what Tao is) tell it not; those who tell it, know it not[7]. Even I shall not tell thee what Tao is. Thyself must discover it, in that thou freest thyself from all passions and cravings, and livest in utter spontaneity, void of unnatural striving. Gently must Tao be approached, with a motion reposeful as the movement of that broad ocean. That moves, not because it chooses to move, nor because it knows that it is wise or good to move; it moves involuntarily, unconscious of movement. Thus wilt thou also return to Tao, and when thou art returned thou wilt know it not, for thou thyself wilt be Tao."

He ceased speaking, and looked at me gently. His eyes shone with a quiet light, still and even as the tint of the heavens.

"Father" I said, «what thou sayest is beautiful as the sea, and it seems as simple as nature; but surely it is not so easy — this strifeless, inactive absorption of man into Tao?"

"Do not confuse words one with another" he replied. "By strifelessness — Wu-Wei — Lao-Tse did not mean common inaction —, not mere idling, with closed eyes. He meant: relaxation from earthly activity, from desire — the craving for unreal things. But he *did* exact activity in *real* things. He implied a powerful movement of the soul, which must be

freed from its gloomy body like a bird from its cage. He meant a yielding to the inner motive-force which we derive from Tao and which leads us to Tao again. And, believe me: this movement is as natural as that of the cloud above us"....

High in the blue ether over our heads were golden clouds, sailing slowly towards the sea. They gleamed with a wonderful purity, as of a high and holy love. Softly, softly they were floating away.

"In a little while they will be gone, vanished in the infinity of the heavens," said the hermit, "and thou wilt see nothing but the eternal blue. Thus will thy soul be absorbed into Tao."

"My life is full of sins," I answered, "I am heavily burdened with darkening desires. And so are my benighted fellow-men. How can *our* life ever — thus luminously, in its purest essence — float towards Tao? It is so heavy with evil, it must surely sink back into the mire."

"Do not believe it, do not believe it!" exclaimed the sage, smiling in gracious kindliness. "No man can annihilate Tao, and there shines in each one of us the inextinguishable light of the soul. Do not believe that the evilness of humanity is so great and so mighty. The eternal Tao dwells in all; in murderers and harlots as well as in philosophers and poets. All bear within them an indestructible treasure, and not one is better than another. You cannot love the one in preference to the other; you cannot bless the one and damn the other.

They are as alike in essence as two grains of sand on this rock. And not one will be banished out of Tao eternally, for all bear Tao within them. Their sins are illusive, having the vagueness of vapours. Their deeds are a false seeming; and their words pass away like ephemeral dreams. They cannot be "bad", they cannot be "good" either. Irresistibly they are drawn to Tao, as yonder waterdrop to the great sea. It may last longer with some than with others, that is all. And a few centuries — what matter they in the face of Eternity? — Poor friend! Has thy sin made thee so fearful? Hast thou held thy sin to be mightier than Tao? Hast thou held the sin of men to be mightier than Tao? — Thou hast striven to be good overmuch, and so hast seen with a false clearness thine own badness. Thou hast desired overmuch goodness in thy fellowmen also, and therefore has their sin unduly troubled thee. But all this is a seeming. Tao is neither good nor bad. For Tao is real. Tao alone *is*; and the life of all unreal things is a life of false contrasts and relations, which have no independent existence, and do greatly mislead. So, above all, do not desire to be good, neither call thyself bad. Wu-Wei — unstriving, self-impelled — that must thou be. Not bad — not good; not little — and not great; not low — and not high. And only then wilt thou in reality *be*, even whilst, in the ordinary sense, thou art not. When once thou art free from all thy seeming, from all thy craving

and lusting, then wilt thou move of thine own impulse, without so much as knowing that thou movest; and this, the only true life-principle — this free, untrammelled motion of thine towards Tao — will be light and unconscious as the dissolution of the little cloud above thee."

I experienced a sudden sense of freedom. The feeling was not joy — not happiness. It was rather a gentle sense of expansion — a widening of my mental horizon.

"Father" I said, "I thank thee! This thy revelation of Tao lends me already an impulse which, though I cannot explain it, yet seems to bear me gently forward.

"How wonderful is Tao! With all my wisdom — with all my knowledge, I have never felt this before!"

"Speak not of this craving for wisdom!" said the sage. "Do not desire to know too much — so only shalt thou grow to know intuitively; for the knowledge acquired by unnatural striving only leads away from Tao. Make no effort to know all that there is to know concerning the men and things around thee, nor — and this more especially — concerning their relations and contrasts. Above all, seek not happiness too greedily, and be not fearful of unhappiness. For neither of these is real. Joy is not real, nor pain either. Tao would not be Tao, wert thou able to picture it to thyself as pain, as joy, as happiness or unhappiness; for Tao is one Whole, and in it no contrasts may exist. Hear

how simply it is expressed by Chuang Tse: 'The greatest joy is no joy.' And pain too will have vanished for thee! Thou must never believe pain to be a real thing, an essential element of existence. Thy pain will one day vanish from thee as the mists vanish from the mountains. For one day thou wilt realise how natural, how spontaneous are all facts of existence; and all the great problems which have held for thee mystery and darkness will become Wu-Wei, quite simple, non-resistent, no longer a source of marvel to thee. For everything grows out of Tao, everything is a natural part of the great system developed from a single principle. — Then nothing will have power to trouble thee nor to rejoice thee more. Thou wilt laugh no more, neither wilt thou weep. — I see thee look up doubtfully, as though thou foundest me too hard, too cold. Nevertheless, when thou art somewhat further advanced thou wilt realise that *this* it means, to be in perfect sympathy with Tao. Then, looking upon pain, thou wilt know that one day it must disappear, because it is unreal; and looking upon joy, thou wilt understand that it is but a primitive and shadowy joy, dependent upon time and circumstance, and deriving its apparent existence from contrast with pain. Looking upon a goodly man, thou wilt find it wholly natural that he should be as he is, and thou wilt experience a foreshadowing of how much goodlier he will be in that day when he shall no longer represent the "kind" and "good". And

upon a murderer thou wilt look with all calmness, with neither special love nor special hate; for he is thy fellow in Tao, and all his sin is powerless to annihilate Tao within him. Then, for the first time, when thou art Wu-Wei at last — not, in the common human sense, existing — then all will be well with thee, and thou wilt glide through thy life as quietly and naturally as the great sea before us. Naught will ruffle thy peace. Thy sleep will be dreamless, and thy consciousness of self will bring thee no care[8]. Thou wilt see Tao in all things, be one with all existence, and look round upon the whole of nature as upon something with which thou art intimate as with thyself. And passing with calm acceptance through the changes of day and night, summer and winter, life and death, thou thyself wilt one day enter into Tao, where there is no more change, and whence thou didst issue once as pure as thou now returnest."

"Father, what thou sayest is simple — and compels belief. But life is still so dear to me, and I am afraid of death; I am afraid too lest my friends should die, or my wife, or my child! Death seems to me so black and gloomy — and bright, bright is life — with the sun, and the green and flowery earth!"

"That is because thou failest as yet to feel the perfect naturalness of death, which is equal in reality to that of life. Thou thinkest too much of the insignificant body, and the deep grave in which it

must lie; but that is the feeling of a prisoner about to be freed, who is troubled at the thought of leaving the dark cell where he has lived so long. Thou seest death in contrast to life; and both are unreal — both are a changing and a seeming. But thy soul does but glide out of a familiar sea into an unfamiliar ocean. That which is real in thee, thy soul, can never pass away, and this fear is no part of her. Thou must conquer this fear for ever; or, better still, it will happen when thou art older, and hast lived spontaneously, naturally, following the motions of Tao, that thou wilt of thine own accord cease to feel it... Neither wilt thou then mourn for those who have gone home before thee; with whom thou wilt one day be reunited — without knowing, thyself, that thou art reunited to them, because these contrasts will no longer be apparent to thee.....

.... "It came to pass upon a time that Chuang-Tse's wife died, and the widower was found by Hui-Tse sitting calmly upon the ground, passing the time, as was his wont, in beating upon a gong. When Hui-Tse indicated that he interpreted his conduct as indifference, Chuang-Tse replied:

"That is not natural (the way that thou regardest it). At first, it is true, I was troubled — I could not be otherwise. But after some pondering I reflected that originally she was not of this life, and that she had not only at that time not been born, but had been without form also; that not

only was she then without form, but that also into this formlessness no life-germ had as yet penetrated. That then, nevertheless, as in a sun-warmed furrow, life-energy began to stir; out of life-energy grew form, and form became birth. Today another change has completed itself, and she has died. This resembles the rise and fall of the four seasons: spring, autumn, winter, summer. She sleeps calmly in the Great House. Were I now to weep and wail, it were to act as though the soul of all this had not entered into me, — therefore I do it no more [9]."

This he told in all simplicity, and in a tone that showed how natural it appeared to him. But it was not yet clear to me, and I said:

"I find this wisdom terrible; it almost makes me afraid. Life would seem to me so cold and empty, were I as wise as this."

"Life *is* cold and empty" he answered, quietly, but with no trace of contempt in his tone; — "and men are as deceptive as life itself. There is not one who knows himself, not one who knows his fellows; and yet they are all alike. There is, in fact, no such thing as life; it is unreal."

I could say no more, and stared before me into the twilight. The mountains were sleeping peacefully in the tender, bloom-like shimmer of vague night-mists — lying like lowly children beneath the broad heavens. Below us was an indistinct twinkling of little red lights. From the distance rose a sad monotonous song, the wail of a flute accompanying

it. In the depths of the darkness lay the sea in its majesty, and the sound of infinitude swelled far and wide.

Then there arose in me a great sadness, and my eyes filled, as with passionate insistence I asked him:

"And what of friendship, then? — and what of love?" —

He looked at me. I could not see him plainly in the darkness, but there shone from his eyes a curious soft light, and he answered gently:

"These are the best things in life, by very far. They are one with the first stirring of Tao within thee. But one day thou wilt know of them as little as the stream knows of its banks when it is lost in the endless ocean. Think not that I would teach thee to banish love from thy heart; for that would be to go against Tao. Love what thou lovest, and be not misled by the thought that love is a hindrance which holds thee in bondage. To banish love from they heart would be a mad and earthly action, and would put thee further away from Tao than thou hast ever been. I say only, that love will one day vanish of itself without thy knowing, and that Tao is not Love. But forget not, that — so far as I desire it, and so far as it is good for thee — I am discoursing to thee of the very highest things. Were I only speaking of this life and of men, I should say: Love is the highest of all. But for him who is absorbed again into Tao, love is a thing past and forgotten. —

"Now, it has grown late, and I would not impart overmuch to thee at first. Thou wilt surely desire to sleep within the Temple, and I will prepare thy couch. Come with me — and descend thou the mountain with all caution!"

He lit a little light, and held out his hand to lead me. Slowly we proceeded, step by step. He was as careful of me as though I had been his child; he lighted my path at every steep descent, and let me gently forward, taking heed of all my movements.

When we arrived at the foot, he showed me the little guest-chamber set apart for mandarins [10], and fetched pillow and covering for me.

"I thank thee, Father, from my heart!" I said. "When shall I ever be able to show thee my gratitude?"

He looked at me quietly, and the glance was great, like the sea. Calm was he and gentle as night. He smiled at me, and it was like the light laughing upon the earth. And silently he left me.

II.

ART.

II.

ART.

"What is art?" I asked the hermit.

We were sitting upon the mountain-side, in the shadow of an overhanging rock. Before us stretched the sea — one endless gleam of light in the sunshine. Golden sails were driving quietly over it, and white seagulls sweeping in noble curvings lightly hither and thither, while great snow-pure clouds came up and sailed by in the blue, majestic in progress, steady and slow.

"It is as natural as the sea — the birds — the clouds," he answered. "I do not think thou wilt find this so hard to grasp and feel as Tao. Thou hast only to look around thee — earth, clouds, atmosphere, everything wilt teach it thee. Poetry has existed as long as heaven and earth [11].

"Beauty was born with the heavens and the earth. The sun, the moon, and the red mists of morning and evening illumine each other, and yet — inexhaustible and wonderful as are the changes

presented by them, Nature's great phenomena — there exist no pigments, as with garments, for the dyeing of them. All phenomena of the world bring forth sound when set in motion, and every sound implies some motion which has caused it. The greatest of all sounds are wind and thunder.

"Listen to the mountain stream racing over the rocks! As soon as it is set in motion the sound of it — high or low, short or long — makes itself heard, not actually according to the laws of music, it is true, yet having a certain rhythm and system.

"This is the natural (spontaneous) voice of heaven and earth; the voice that is caused by movement.

"Well, and in the purest mood of the human heart, at a time when the fire of the intellect is at its brightest, then, if it be moved, it too will give forth sound. Is it not a wondrous metamorphosis that out of this should be created literature?

"Poetry, then, is the sound of the heart.

"This is very natural, and so wilt thou have felt it to be. Poetry is to be heard and seen everywhere, for the whole of Nature is one great poet. But just because of its simplicity, therefore is it so strict and unalterable. Where the spring of movement is, there flows the sound of the poem. Any other sound is no poetry. The sound must come quite of itself — Wu Wei — it cannot be generated by any artifices. There are many — how many! — who by unnatural movement force forth sound; but these are no poets, rather do they re-

semble apes and parrots. Few indeed are the true poets, from whom the verse flows of itself, full of music, — powerful as the roaring of the torrent amongst the rocks, as the rolling of thunder in the clouds, — soft as the swishing of an evening shower, or as the gentle breath of a summer night-breeze. — Listen! listen to the sea at our feet! Is it not singing a wondrous song? Is it not a very poem? — is it not pure music? Seest thou how the waves are swaying in ceaseless mobility — one after the other — one over the other — swinging onward and onward — ever further and further — returning to vanish in music once more? Dost thou hear their rhythmic rushing? Oh! great and simple must a poet be — like the sea! His movement, like that of the sea, is an impulse out of Tao, and in that — tranquil, strifeless, obedient as a child — must he let himself go. Great, great is the sea. Great, great is the poet. But greater — greater — is Tao, that which is not great!"

He was silent, listening to the sea, and I saw how the music of it entered into him.

I had reflected much since hearing his first words concerning Tao. I was fearful lest his great and lofty philosophy should mean death to the artist, and that I also, in giving myself over to this wisdom of his, should become incapable of feeling the pure inspiration of the poet, and of being any more childishly enraptured at the sight of beauty.

But he himself was standing there in the purest

ecstasy, as though he were now looking upon the sea for the first time; and reverently, with shining eyes, he listened to the rush of the waves. "Is it not beautiful?" he said again, "is it not beautiful, this sound, that came out of Tao, the soundless? this light, that shone out of Tao the lightless? and the gift of verse, the sonorous music of words, born of Tao the wordless? Do we not live in an endless mystery? A mystery which will one day resolve itself into plain and absolute truth!"

I was a long time silent. But I could not quite grasp it yet. It seemed all too simple for me. And I asked him doubtfully: "Can it really be so easy — to make and sing poems? It is surely not so easy for us to bring forth verse as for the stream to rush over the rocks? Must we not first practise and train ourselves, and learn to know the verse-forms thoroughly? And is not that voluntary action, rather than involuntary motion?

But my question did not embarrass him, and he answered at once: —

"Do not let that perplex thee. All depends on whether a man has in him the true spring from which the verse should flow, or not. Has he the pure impulse from Tao within him? or is his life-motive something less simply beautiful? If he *has* that source in him he is a poet, if he has it not he is none. By this time thou wilt surely realise that, considered from a high standpoint, all men are really poets; for, as I have told thee,

there exists in all men the essential, original impulse emanating from and returning to Tao. But rarely do we find this impulse so alert and strongly developed as to endow men with perception of those higher revelations of beauty through which their bank-bound life-stream flows till it is lost in boundless eternity. — Or one might express it thus: that ordinary men are like still water in swampy ground, in the midst of poor vegetation; while poets are clear streams, flowing amidst the splendour of luxuriant banks to the endless ocean. But I will rather not speak so much in pictures, for that is not plain enough.

"Thou wouldst fain know whether a man who *has* the true inspiration of the poet must not nevertheless train himself somewhat in his art, or whether he moves in it entirely of himself, like nature? — The latter is without doubt the case! For do not forget that a young poet, having studied verse-form in all its variety for a short time, suddenly comes to find these forms so natural as to preclude his inclination for any other. His verses assume beautiful form involuntarily, simply because other movement would be alien. That is just the difference between the poet and the dilettante, that the poet sings his verse spontaneously, from his own impulse, and afterwards, proving it, finds it to be right in sound — in rhythm — in all its movement; whereas the dilettante, after first marking out for himself a certain verse-form, according to

the approved pattern of the art-learned, proceeds to project by main force a series of wholly soulless words upon it. The soulful words of the poet flowed of themselves just because they were soulful. And, if we view things in their true light, there do actually exist *no* hard and fast forms for poetry, and absolutely no laws; for a verse which flows spontaneously from its source moves of itself, and is independent of all preconceived human standards! The one law is that there shall be no law. Mayhap thou wilt find this over-daring, young man! But remember that my demonstrations are taken not from men, but out of Tao, and that I know, moreover, but very few true poets. The man who is simple and pure as Nature is rare indeed. Thinkest thou that there are many such in thine own land?"

This unexpected question embarrassed me, and I wondered what could be his drift. It was hard to answer too, so I asked him first another question.

"Great Master, I cannot answer until I hear more from thee. *Why does* a poet make a poem?

That seemed to astonish him mightily, for he repeated it, as though doubting if he had heard aright:

"Why should a poet make a poem?"

"Yes, Master, why?"

Then he laughed outright, and said:

"Why does the sea roar? Why does the bird sing? Dost thou know that, my son?"

Because they cannot help it, Father, because

they simply must give their nature vent in that way! It is Wu Wei!"

"Quite so! Well, — and why should it be different with a poet?"

I considered, but my answer came none too readily:

"Yes, but it *may* be different. A poet may sing for the sake of creating or enriching a literature, where there is none, or it is in danger of dying out. That has a fine sound, but is no pure motive. Or some poets sing in order to cover themselves with glory — to be famous, to be crowned with shining laurels, and to gain the smiles of fair, bright-eyed maidens who strew flowers on the path before them!"

"Thou must express thyself with greater exactness," said the hermit, "and not desecrate words which amongst thousands of other words are accounted the holiest. For poets who sing for such reasons are no poets at all. A poet sings because he sings. He cannot sing with any given purpose, or he becomes a dilettante."

"And then, Father, supposing a poet to have sung as simply as a bird, may he not afterwards take pleasure in the laurels and the roses? — Can he jealously hate those who wear the laurels of which he deems himself to be worthy? — Can he belie his soul's convictions, and call beauty ugly, despising the beauty which he has created? — Can he call the beautiful hateful, because the laurels come

from unwelcome hands? — Can he drape himself in a false garb, and elect to act differently from other men, in order to gain prominence through eccentricity? — Can he deem himself better than the common run of men? — Can he press the common hands which applaud him? — Or can he hate them who deride instead of crowning him? —

"How canst thou interpret to me all these things? They all appear so strange to me, in comparison with the simplicity of the little bird and the great sea!"

"All these questions, young friend, are an answer to *my* question," he replied; "for the fact that thou wouldst know all this is a proof that there are not many poets in thy country. Remember that I understand and use the word 'poet' in its purest, highest meaning. A poet can only live for his art, which he loves as art, and not as a means for securing a vague earthly enjoyment. A poet looks upon men and things — in their simplest nature and relationship — so simply, that he himself approaches very nearly to the nature of Tao. Other men see men and things but hazily, as through a fog. The poet realises this to be an incontestable fact. How then can he expect his simplicity to be understood by the hazy mind of the public? How can he cherish feelings of hate and grief when it derides him? How feel pleasure when it would crown him? It is the same in this case as with the four 'seasons' of Chuang-Tse. There is nothing

specially agitating in it all, because it is the natural course of things. Consequently the poet is neither in despair when he is not heard, nor happy when he is fêted. He looks upon the state of things with regard to the multitude and the way it comports itself towards him as a natural consequence, of which he knows the cause. The judgment of the common people is not even so much as indifferent to him — it simply does not exist for him. He does not sing his verses for the sake of the people, but because he cannot help himself. The sound of human comment on his work escapes him entirely, and he knows not whether he be famous or forgotten. 'The highest fame is no fame'. *) Thou lookest at me, young man, as though I were telling thee stranger things than thou hast ever dared to dream of. But I am telling thee nothing but the simplest truth, simple and natural as the truth in landscape or sea. Because thou hast dwelt until so lately amidst the pressure-full life of thy countrymen, therefore thou hast never yet seen true simplicity. Thou hast for so long heard nothing spoken of but 'fame', 'earnings', 'honour', 'artists' and 'immortality', that, for all thou knowest, these things may be indispensable as air, and veritable as thy soul. But it is all a seeming and deception. Those whom thou hast seen may indeed have been

*) From the "Nan Hwa King" — Chap. 18.

poets of true fibre, but they had been led astray from the impulse derived from Tao which was their life-principle, and they did not remain what they were, but sank through their weakness to the nature of commonplace men. So that they have come to do as ordinary men do, only they do it more strongly. So much do I gather from thy questioning. But all these are poets no longer, and will sing no more true poetry so long as they are as they are. For the smallest deviation from the original impulse is sufficient to kill the poetry within them. There is but the one direct way: single and simple as a maiden — uncompromising as a straight line. This straight line is spontaneity; on either side of it lie false activity and the unnatural — also the roads to fame and notoriety, where occur murder, and sudden death, and where one bosom friend will suck the life-blood from another to further the attainment of his own ends. The straight line cuts its own way, without deviation or secret windings, in simple continuance into infinity.

"Thou wilt understand then, that thus, by the nature of things, all those situations which would convert the poet into the sacrificial victim of the mob become impossible. Thou hast probably read, in the history alike of thy country and my own, of poets who have died of grief at want of recognition, or who have taken their own lives on account of undeserved contumely. I have indeed always felt the pathos of this, yet have realised

that to such poets as these the term truly great cannot be applied.

"And I am speaking, of course, not of the artists of speech only, but of all artists. Shall I show thee now something by an artist as true and simple minded as I can conceive a man to be? — Come with me then!"

He led me into a small chamber in his hut — a cell with white walls and no furniture save the bed, a table covered with books, and a few chairs. He opened a door in the wall, and drew out from it a wooden chest. This he carried as carefully as though it had been some sacred object or a little child. He set it gently down upon the floor, opened the lid, and lifted out a closed shrine of red-brown wood, which he placed upon the table. [12]

"See," he remarked, "this is a beautiful shrine, to begin with. A beautiful thing must have a beautiful setting. At present the little doors are shut. Dost thou not find this a goodly thought: to be able ever thus to hold it hidden from profane eyes? — But before *thee* I may well open it."

And the two wings of the shrine flew open.

Against a background of pale blue silk appeared a large figure, gleaming, and shimmering, and diffusing a wonderful radiance of its own. It was the Buddha Kwan Yin, seated upon a lotus that reared itself, straight, and graceful, and modestly opened, above a tumult of wild waves. [13]

"Perceivest thou how absolutely simple and beau-

tiful this is?" he asked me; and in his voice there spoke a great and tender love. "Is not that the very embodiment of perfect rest? — See this serene countenance — how wonderfully tender, and yet how tensely grave, with its closed eyes gazing into infinity! — Look at this cheek, — how delicate and tender! See this mouth — and the lofty curving of the eyebrows — and this pure pearl gleaming over her forehead [14] — the symbol of the soul taking its flight from the body! And the body — how few are the lines of it! Yet see the infinite love and mercifulness in the downward pose of the left arm; and then, in the upraised right arm — in the two raised fingers, held together as in the act of preaching — what an indescribable holiness! And how beautiful the repose of the crossed legs resting so softly upon the lotus! — And see — how tenderly felt, notwithstanding the immense strength and restraint of the whole — the delicate soles of the feet, curved with such subtle gentleness! — Is it not the quintessence of the whole of Buddhism in a single picture? Thou needst not to have read anything of Buddhism in order to appreciate it, now, here, in all its inmost meaning. Rest — is it not absolute rest — this ideally pure countenance gazing thus stilly into eternity? Love — is it not absolute love for the world — this simple drooping of the one arm? And is not the essence of the whole doctrine grasped and confined in the pose of the uplifted fingers?

"And then the material of which such a figure as this is made! Dost thou realize, I wonder, that an artist such as this must have laboured for years and years before his material became as pure and ethereal as he required it to be? For the nature of stone is so hard — is it not? — and the general idea of it: matter — that would suit but ill for the plastic representation of the ideal conception: Rest.— So the artist wrought upon all kinds of common materials, such as clay, sand, and earth, and transformed them, by means of fit and harmonious combination with precious stones, pearls, and jasper, into costly substances. And so the material for this figure became something that was no longer material, but rather the incarnation of a sublime idea. The artist wished to symbolize also in his representation the rosy dawn which broke upon mankind on the appearance of Buddha; and so, shimmering through the snowy white of his porcelain, he introduced just such a vague rosy glow as plays upon the morning clouds before the glory of the sun bursts forth. Is not this half-realised, growing light more instinct with feeling than light itself? Perceivest thou this most indefinite, yet clear and rosy colour shimmering throughout the white? Is it not chaste as the first soft blush of a maiden? Is it not the godly love of the artist that we see thus glowing in the pureness of the white? Such a figure is, in fact, no longer a figure. The idea of material is entirely obliterated; it is an inspiration."

For a long time I was too much moved to speak. Still more than the pure wisdom of the old man I felt the beauty of this art take hold upon and purify my soul. At last I asked gently:

"Who has created this marvel? I would fain know, that I may hold his name with thine in veneration."

"That is of little importance, my young friend!" he answered. "The soul that was in this artist is absorbed again into Tao, just as thine will be one day. His body has fallen away, like the leaves from a tree, just as thine in time will fall away. What weight can attach then to his name? Nevertheless I will tell it thee; he was called Tan Wei, [15] and he impressed this name in finely-devised characters upon the back of the figure, such being the custom at that time. — Who was he? A common workman, assuredly, who did not even know, himself, that he was an artist, who seemed to himself nothing more than a common peasant, and who had not the least suspicion that his work was so beautiful. But he must have gazed much at the heavens and clouds above him, and have loved the wide seas, and the landscapes, and the flowers; otherwise he could not have been so fine in feeling; for such simple lines and pure colours are only to be found in Nature. He was certainly not celebrated; thou wilt not find his name in any history. I could not tell thee whence he came, how he

lived, or to what age. I know only that it is more than four hundred years since such figures as these were made, and that old connoisseurs reckon that this one dates from the first half of the Ming-Dynasty. Most probably the artist lived quite quietly the same sort of life as the other people, worked industriously as a common labourer, and died humbly, unconscious of his own greatness. But his work remained, and this image, which, by a fortunate chance has found its way to this district, where the last wars never raged, is still the same as when he made it. And thus it may last on for centuries and centuries, in inextinguishable radiance, in maidenly majesty. O, to create such a thing, in pure unconscious simplicity, that is to be a poet! That is the art which dates not from time but from eternity! — How beautiful it is! Dost thou not find it so too? This porcelain, that is almost indestructible; and this radiance which never dies away! Here upon the earth it stands, so strong and yet so tender, and so it will still be, long after our successors are dead! — And the soul of the artist is with Tao!"

We continued long to look upon the image. Then he took careful hold of the shrine once more.

"It is so delicate," he said, "that I hardly dare to expose it to broad daylight. For this miracle of tenderness — ethereal as a soul — the daylight is too hard. I feel a kind of anxiety lest the light should suddenly break it in pieces, or cause it to

dissolve like a little light cloud. So wholly soul-like is its composition!"

And softly, very softly, he replaced the shrine within the chest, which he closed.

He went out now, before me, and we seated ourselves again beneath the overhanging rock.

"How beautiful it would be" I said, "if everyone could make things like that, in all simplicity, and surround themselves with them, everywhere!"

"Everyone!" — he answered, "well that is perhaps too much to say! But there really was once a time when this great kingdom was one great temple of art and beauty. Thou mayst still see the traces of it here in China. At that time the greater number of the people were simple-minded artists. All objects surrounding them were beautiful, the smallest thing as well as the greatest — whether it were a temple, a garden, a table, a chair, or a knife. Just examine the little tea-cups, or the smallest censers of that period! The poorest coolie ate out of vessels as perfect in their way as my Kwan-Yin image. All objects were beautifully made, and involuntarily so. The simple artisans naturally did not consider themselves to be artists, or in any way different from their fellowmen, and no petty strife can have arisen between them, otherwise there would have been an end of their art. Everything was beautiful because they were all single-minded and worked honestly. It was as natural in those days for things to be beautiful as

it is now-a-days for them to be ugly. The art of China has sunk to its lowest ebb; that is a consequence of its miserable social condition. Thou wilt surely have remarked that the art of the country is deteriorating. And that is a death-sign for this great Empire. For Art is inseparably connected with the full-bloom of a country's life. If the art declines, then the whole country degenerates. I do not mean this in the political, but rather in the moral sense. For a morally-strong and simple-hearted people brings forth involuntarily a strong and healthy art. — Yes, what thou saidst is true; how much better would men's lives be, could they but create for themselves better surroundings! And how extraordinary that this is not done! For Nature remains ever and everywhere accessible to them. See the clouds — the trees — the sea!"

The sea was still, as ever, splashing at our feet — boundless, true, and pure. Clouds sailed majestically landwards, with a slow motion, in the full blaze of the light. Golden gleams, falling upon the mountains, vanished again with the rhythmical sweep of the clouds. Light and motion, sound and play of colour, everywhere!

The hermit gazed calmly at this infinite loveliness; as confidently and naturally as though deeply conscious of the intimate relationship existing between him all his surroundings. He seemed to guess what was in my mind as I looked at him, for he said:

"We fit as naturally into this beauty around us as a tree or a mountain. If we can but remain so always, we shall retain the feeling of our own well-being midst all the great workings of the world-system. So much has been said about human life; and scholars have created an endless labyrinth of theories. And yet in its inmost kernel it is as simple as Nature. No one thing exists that is simpler than any other, and nothing is really in confusion, however much it may seem as though it were so. Everything moves as surely and inevitably as the sea."

There rang in his voice both the great love of the poet and the quiet assurance of the scholar who takes his stand upon incontrovertible truth.

"Art thou satisfied for to-day?" was his friendly question; "and have I helped thee forward a little? Dost thou feel more clearly what poetry is?"

"Father," I answered, "thy wisdom is poetry, and thy poetry is wisdom! How can that be?"

"That is quite true, from thy point of view," he answered. "But thou hast yet to learn that all these words are but a seeming. I know not what my wisdom is, nor my poetry. It is all one. It is so simple and natural when thou understandest this! It is all Tao."

III.

LOVE.

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LOVE.

Once more it was evening. We sat again upon the soft turf of the mountain-side, the quietness of our mood in sympathy with the solemn stillness of twilight. The distant mountain-ranges reposed in an atmosphere breathing reverence and devotion — they seemed to be kneeling beneath the heavens, beneath the slow-descending blessing of night. The isolated trees dotted here and there about the hills stood motionless, in a pause of silent worshipping. The rush of the sea sounded distant and indistinct, lost in its own greatness. Peace lay over everything, and soft sounds went up as of prayer.

The hermit stood before me, dignified as a tree in the midst of Nature, and awe-inspiring as the evening itself.

I had returned to question him again. For my soul found no repose apart from him, and a mighty impulse was stirring within me. But now that I found

myself near him, I hardly dared to speak; and indeed it seemed as though words were no longer necessary — as though everything lay, of itself, open and clear as daylight. How goodly and simple everything appeared that evening! Was it not my own inmost being that I recognised in all the beauty around me? and was not the whole on the point of being absorbed into the Eternal?

Nevertheless I broke in upon this train of feeling, and cleft the peaceful silence with my voice:

"Father," I said sadly, "all thy words dwell in my mind, and my soul is filled with the balm of them. This soul of mine is no longer my own — no longer what it used to be. It is as though I were dead; and I know not what is passing within me by day — by night — that it should grow so light, and clear, and vacant in my mind. Father, I know it is Tao; it is death, and glorious resurrection; but it is not love; and without love, Tao appears to me but a gloomy lie."

The old man looked round him at the evening scene, and smiled gently.

"What *is* love?" he asked calmly. "Art thou sure about that, I wonder?"

"No, I am not sure," I answered. "I do not know anything about it, but that is just the reason of its great blessedness. Yes, do but let me express it! I mean love of a maiden, love of a woman. I remember yet, Father, what it was to me when I saw the maiden, and my soul knew delight for

the first time. It was like a sea, like a broad heaven, like death. It was light — and I had been blind. It hurt, Father — my heart beat so violently — and my eyes burned. The world was a fire, and all things were strange, and began to live. It was a great flame flaring from out my soul. It was so fearful, and so lovely, but so infinitely great! Father, I think it was greater than Tao!"

"I know well what it was," said the sage. "It was Beauty, the earthly form of the formless Tao, calling up in thee the rhythm of that movement by which thou wilt enter into Tao. Thou mightest have experienced the same at sight of a tree, a cloud, a flower. But because thou art human, living by desire, therefore to thee it could only be revealed through another human being, a woman — and because, also, that form is to thee more easily understood, and more familiar. And since desire did not allow the full upgrowth of a pure contemplation, therefore was the rhythm within thee wrought up to be wild tempest, like a storm-thrashed sea that knows not whither it is tending. The inmost essence of the whole emotion was not love, but Tao."

But the calmness of the old sage made me impatient, and excited me to answer roughly:

"It is easy to discourse all this in theory, but seeing that thou hast never experienced it thyself, thou canst understand nothing of that of which thou speakest!"

He looked at me steadily, and laid his hand sympathetically on my shoulder.

"It would be cruel of thee, hadst thou so spoken to anyone but me, young man! — I loved, before thou drewest breath in this world! At that time there lived a maiden, so wondrous to see, it was as if she were the direct-born expression of Tao. For me she was the world, and the world lay dead around her. I saw nothing but her, and for me there existed no such things as trees, men, or clouds. She was more beautiful than this evening, gentler than the lines of those distant mountains, more tender than those hushed tree-tops; and the light of her presence was more blessed to see than the still shining of yonder star. I will not tell thee her story. It was more scorching than a very hell-fire — but it was not real, and it is over now, like a storm that has passed. It seemed to me that I must die; I longed to flee from my pain into death. — But there came a dawning in my soul, and all grew light and comprehensible. Nothing was lost. All was yet as it had been. The beauty which I believed to have been taken from me lived on still, spotless, in myself. For not from this woman, — out of my soul had this beauty sprung; and this I saw shining yet, all over the world, with an everlasting radiance. Nature was no other than what I had fashioned to myself out of that shadowy form of a woman. And my soul was one with Nature, and floated with a like rhythm towards the eternal Tao."

Calmed now by his calmness, I said: "She whom I loved is dead, Father — She who culled my soul as a child culls a flower never became my wife. But I have a wife now, a miracle of strength and goodness, a wife who is essential to me as light and air. I do not love her as I even now love the dead. But I know that she is a purer human being than that other. How is it then that I do *not* love her so much? She has transformed my wild and troubled life into a tranquil march towards death. She is simple and true as Nature itself, and her face is dear to me as the sunlight."

"Thou lovest her, indeed!" said the sage, "but thou knowest not what love means, nor loving. I will tell it thee. Love is no other than the rhythm of Tao. I have told thee: thou art come out of Tao, and to Tao thou wilt returu. Whilst thou art young, with thy soul still enveloped in darkness, when thou feelest the shock of the first impulse within thee, thou knowest not yet whither thou goest. Thou seest the woman before thee. Thou believest the woman to be that towards which the rhythm is driving thee. But even when the woman is thine, and even when thou hast thrilled at the touch of her, thou feelest yet the rhythm within thee, unappeased, and knowest that thou must forward, ever further, if thou wouldst bring it to a standstill. Then it is that in the soul of the man and of the woman there ariseth a great sadness, and they look at one another, questioning

whither they are now bound. Gently they clasp one another by the hand, and move on thus through life, swayed by the same impulse, towards the same goal. Call this love if thou wilt. What is a name? I call it Tao. And the souls of those who love are like two white clouds floating softly side by side, that vanish, wafted by the same wind, into the infinite blue of the heavens."

"But that is not the love that I mean!" I cried. "Love is not the desire to see the loved one absorbed into Tao; love is the longing to be always with her; the deep yearning for the blending of the two souls in one; the hot desire to soar, in one breath with her, into felicity! And this always with the loved one alone — not with others, not with Nature. And were I absorbed into Tao, all this happiness would be for ever lost! Oh let me stay here, in this goodly world, with my faithful companion! Here it is so bright and homely, and Tao is still so gloomy and inscrutable for me."

"The hot desire dies out," he answered calmly. "The body of thy loved one will wither and pass away within the cold earth. The leaves of the trees fade in autumn, and the withered flowers droop sadly to the ground. How canst thou love that so much which does not last? However, thou knowest, in truth, as yet, neither how thou lovest nor what it is that thou lovest. The beauty of woman is but a vague reflection of the formless beauty of Tao. The emotion it awakens, the long-

ing to lose thyself in her beauty, that ecstasy of feeling which would lend wings for the flight of thy soul with thy beloved — beyond horizon-bounds, into regions of bliss — believe me, it is no other than the rhythm of Tao; only thou knowest it not. Thou resemblest still the river which knows as yet only its shimmering banks, and which has no knowledge of the power that draws it forward, but which will one day inevitably flow out into the great ocean. Why this striving after happiness, after human happiness, that lasts but a moment and then vanishes again? Chuang-Tse said truly: 'The highest happiness is no happiness.' Is it not small and pitiable, this momentary uprising, and downfalling, and uprising again? This wavering, weakly intention and progress of men? Do not seek happiness in a woman. She is the joyful revelation of Tao directed towards thee. She is the purest form in the whole of nature by which Tao is manifested. She is the gentle force that awakens the rhythm of Tao within thee. But she herself is only a poor creature like thyself. And thou art for her the same joyful revelation that she is to thee. Fancy not that that which thou perceivest in her is that Tao, that very holiest, into which thou wouldst one day ascend! For then thou wouldst surely reject her when thou didst realise what she was. If thou wilt truly love a woman, then love her as being of the same poor nature as thyself, and do not seek happiness with

her. Whether in thy love thou seest this or not — her inmost being is Tao. A poet looks upon a woman, and, swayed by the 'rhythm', he perceives the beauty of the beloved in all things — in the trees, the mountains, the horizon; for the beauty of a woman is the same as that of Nature. It is the form of Tao, the great and formless, and what thy soul desires in the excitement of beholding — this strange, unspeakable feeling — is nothing but thy oneness with this beauty, and with the source of this beauty — Tao. And the like is experienced by thy wife. Ye are for each other angels, who lead one another to Tao unconsciously."

I was silent for a while, reflecting. In the soft colouring and stillness of the evening lay a great sadness. Above the horizon, where the sun had set, there glimmered a streak of faint red light, like dying pain.

"What is this sadness, then, in the Nature around us?" I asked. "Is there not that in the twilight as though the whole earth were weeping with a grievous longing? See how she mourns, with these fading hues, these drooping tree-tops, and solemn mountains. Human eyes are fain to fill with tears, as this great grief of Nature looms within their sight. It is as though she were longing for her beloved — as though everything — seas, mountains and heavens — were full of mourning."

And the Sage replied: "It is the same pain which cries in the hearts of men. Thine own

longing quivers in Nature too. The 'Heimweh' of the evening is also the 'Heimweh' of thy soul. Thy soul hath lost her love, Tao, with whom she once was one; and thy soul desires re-union with her love. Absolute re-union with Tao — is not that an immense love? — to be so absolutely one with the beloved that thou art wholly hers, she wholly thine; — a union so full and eternal that neither death nor life can ever cleave your oneness again? so tranquil and pure that desire can no more awaken in thee — perfect blessedness being attained, and a holy and permanent peace? . . . For Tao is one single, eternal, pure infinitude of soul.

"Is that not more perfect than the love of a woman? — this poor, sad love, each day of which reveals to thee some sullying of the clear life of the soul by dark and sanguine passion? When thou art absorbed into Tao, then only wilt thou be completely, eternally united with the soul of thy beloved, with the souls of all men, thy brothers, and with the soul of Nature. And the few moments of blessedness fleetingly enjoyed by all lovers upon earth are as nothing in comparison with that endless bliss: the blending of the souls of all who love in an eternity of perfect purity."

A horizon of blessedness opened out before my soul, wider than the vague horizon of the sea, wider than the heavens.

"Father!" I cried in ecstasy "can it be that

everything is so holy, and I have never known it? — I have been so filled with longing, and so worn-out with weeping; and my breast has been heavy with sobs and dread. I have been so consumed with fear! I have trembled at the thought of death! I have despaired of all being good, when I saw so much suffering around me. I have believed myself to be damned by reason of the wild passions, the bodily desires, which burned within and flamed without me, and which, though hating them, I, coward-like, still was doomed to serve. With what breathless horror I have realised how the tender flower-like body of my love must one day moulder and crumble away in the cold dark earth! I have believed that I should never feel again that blessed peace at the look in her eyes, through which her soul was shining. And was it Tao! — was Tao really even then always within me, like a faithful guardian? and was it Tao that shone from her eyes? Was Tao in everything that surrounded me? in the clouds, the trees and the sea? Is the inmost being of earth and heaven, then, also the inmost being of my beloved and my own soul? Is it *that* for which there burns within me that mysterious longing which I did not understand, and which drove me so restlessly onward? I thought it was leading me away from the beloved, and that I was ceasing to love her! — Was it really the rhythm of Tao, then, that moved my beloved too? — the same as that in which all nature breathes,

and all suns and planets pursue their shining course through all eternity? — Then all is indeed rendered holy! — then Tao is indeed in everything, as my soul is in Tao! Oh, Father, Father! it is growing so light in my heart! My soul seems to foresee that which will come one day; and the heavens above us and the great sea, they foretell it too! See, how reverent is the pose of these trees around us, and see the lines of the mountains, how soft in their holy repose! All Nature is filled with sacred awe, and my soul too thrills with ecstasy, for she has looked upon her beloved!"

I sat there long, in silent, still forgetfulness. It was to me as though I were one with the soul of my master and with Nature. I saw nothing and heard nothing; — void of all desire, bereft of all will, I lay sunk in the deepest peace. I was awakened by a soft sound close by me. A fruit had fallen from the tree to the ground behind us. When I looked up, it was into shimmering moonlight. The sage was standing by me, and bent over me kindly.

"Thou hast strained thy spirit overmuch, my young friend!" he said concernedly. "It is too much for thee in so short a time. Thou hast fallen asleep from exhaustion. The sea sleeps too. See, not a furrow breaks its even surface; motionless, dreaming, it receives the benediction of the light. But thou must waken! It is late, thy boat is ready, and thy wife awaits thee at home in the town."

I answered, still half dreaming: "I would so gladly stay here! Let me return with my wife, and stay here for ever! I cannot return to the people again! Ah, Father, I shudder — I can see their scoffing faces, their insulting glances, their disbelief, and their irreverence! How can I retain the wondrous light and tender feeling of my soul in the midst of this ungracious people? How can I ever so hide it under smile or speech that they shall never detect it, nor desecrate it with their shameful ridicule?"

Then he said, laying his hand earnestly upon my shoulder:

"Listen carefully to what I now say to thee, my friend, and above all, believe me. I shall give thee pain, but I cannot help it. Thou *must* return to the world and thy fellow-men; it cannot be otherwise. Thou hast spoken too much with me already; perhaps I have said somewhat too much to thee. Thy further growth must be thine own doing, and thou must find out everything for thyself. Be thou only simple of heart, and thou wilt discover everything without effort, like a child finding flowers. At this moment thou feelest deeply and purely what I have said to thee. This present mood is one of the highest moments of thy life. But thou canst not yet be strong enough to maintain it. Thou wilt relapse, and spiritual feeling will turn again to words and theories. Only by slow degrees wilt thou grow once more to feel it purely and

keep it permanently. When that is so, then thou mayst return hither in peace, and then thou wilt do well to remain here; — but by that time I shall be long dead.

"Thou must complete thy growth in the midst of life, not outside it; for thou art not yet pure enough to rise above it. A moment ago, it is true, thou wast equal even to that, but the reaction will soon set in. Thou mayest not shun the rest of mankind; they are thine equals, even though they may not feel so purely as thou dost. Thou canst go amongst them as their comrade, and take them by the hand; only do not let them look upon thy soul, so long as they are still so far behind thee. They would not mock thee from evil-mindedness, but rather out of religious persuasion, being unaware how utterly miserable, how godless, how forsaken they are, and how far from all those holy things by which thou actually livest. Thou must be so strong in thy conviction that nothing can hinder thee. And that thou wilt only become after a long and bitter struggle. But from out of thy tears will grow thy strength, and through pain thou wilt attain peace. Above all remember that Tao, Poetry and Love are one and the same, although thou mayst seek to define it by these several vague terms; — that it is always within thee and around thee; — that it never forsakes thee; and that thou art safe and well cared for in this holy environment. Thou art surrounded with benefits, and sheltered by a love

which is eternal. Everything is rendered holy through the primal force of Tao dwelling within it."

He spoke so gently and convincingly that I had no answer to give. Willingly I allowed myself to be guided by him to the shore. My boat lay motionless upon the smooth water, awaiting me. —

"Farewell my young friend! Farewell!" he said, calmly and tenderly, "Remember all that I have told thee!"

But I could not leave him in such a manner. Suddenly I thought of the loneliness of his life in this place, and tears of sympathy rose to my eyes. I grasped his hand.

"Father, come with me!" I besought him. "My wife and I will care for thee; we will do everything for thee, and when thou art sick we will tend thee. Do not stay here in this loneliness, so void of all the love that might make life sweet to thee!"

He smiled gently, and shook his head as a father might at some fancy of his child's, answering with tranquil kindness:

"Thou hast lapsed already! Dost thou realise now how necessary it is for thee to remain in the midst of the every-day life? I have but this moment told thee how great is the love which surrounds me — and still thou deemest me lonely here and forsaken? — Here, in Tao, I am as safe at home as a child is with its mother. Thou meanest it well, my friend, but thou must become wiser, much

wiser! Be not concerned for me; that is unnecessary, grateful though I am to thee for this feeling. Think of thyself just now. And do what I tell thee. Believe that I tell thee that which is best for thee. In thy boat lies something which should remind thee of the days thou hast spent here. Farewell!"

I bent silently over his hand and kissed it. I thought I felt that it trembled with emotion; but when I looked at him again his face was calm and cheerful as the moon in the sky.

I stepped into the boat, and the boatman took up the oars. With dextrous strokes he drove it over the even surface of the water. I was already some way from the land when my foot struck against some object in the boat, and it occurred to me that something for me was lying there. I took it up. It was a small chest. Hastily I lifted the lid. And in the soft calm moonlight there shone with mystical radiance the wonderful porcelain of the Kwan-Yin image, the same which the old man had cherished so carefully, and loved so well.

There, in the lofty tranquillity of severe yet gentle lines, in all the ethereal delicacy of the transparent porcelain, reposed the pure figure of Kwan-Yin, amidst the shimmering petals of the lotus. It shone as if with spiritual radiance in the moonlight.

I scarcely dared believe that this holy thing had been given to me. I seized my handkerchief, and waved with it towards the shore, to convey to the

sage my thanks. He stood there motionless, and gazed straight before him. I waited longingly for him to wave — for one more greeting from him — one more sign of love — but he remained immovable.

Was it I after whom he was gazing? Was he gazing at the sea?.....

I closed the lid of the chest, and kept it near me, as though it had been a love of his which I was bearing away. I knew now that he cared for me, but his imperturbable serenity was too great for me — it saddened my mood that he had never signed to me again.

We drew further and further away; the outlines of his figure grew fainter and fainter; at last I could see it no more.

He remained with the dreams of his soul, in the midst of Nature, alone in infinity, bereft of all human love — but close to the great bosom of Tao.

I took my way back to the life amongst mankind, my brothers and equals — in all the souls of whom dwells Tao, primordial and eternal.

The picturesque lights of the harbour gleamed already in the distance, and the drone of the great town sounded nearer and nearer to us over the sea.

Then I felt a great strength in me, and I ordered the boatman to row still more quickly. I was ready. — Was I not as safely and well cared for

in the great town as in the quiet country? — in the street as on the sea?

In everything, everywhere, dwells Poetry — Love — Tao. And the whole world is a great sanctuary, well-devised and surely-maintained as a strong well-ordered house.

NOTES.

NOTES.

1. p. 4. This is a fact. Chinese priests are in the habit of repeating Sutras which, to judge by the sound, have been translated from the Sanscrit into Chinese phrases of which they do not understand one word.

2. p. 6. The "Yellow Emperor" is a legendary emperor, who appears to have reigned about the year 2697 B.C.

3. p. 6. That which follows in inverted commas is an extract translated from the twelfth chapter of the "Nan Hwa King."

4. p. 7. The following passage, as far as the sentence "and the Millions return again into One" is an adaptation — not a translation — of the first section of "Tao-Teh-King". Lao-Tse's wonderfully simple writing cannot possibly be translated into equally simple passages in our language. This rendering of mine — arrived at partly by aid of Chinese commentators — is an entirely new reading, and is, to the best of my knowledge, the true one. One of the most celebrated, and, in a certain sense, one of the most competent of the sinologues, Herbert Giles, translates of this first section only the first sentence, and finds the rest not worth the trouble of translating! (Compare "The Remains of Lao Tzü" by H. A. Giles, Honkong, China Mail Office, 1886). This same scholar trans-

lates "Tao" as "the Way", not perceiving how impossible it is that that which Lao-Tse meant — the highest of all, the infinite — should be a "way", seeing that a way (in the figurative sense) always leads to something else, and therefore cannot be the highest. Another still more celebrated sinologue, Dr. Legge, translates "Tao" as "Course", and out of the simple sentence: "If Tao could be expressed in words it would not be the eternal Tao" he makes: "The Course that can be trodden is not the enduring and unchanging course." The whole secret is this: that the sign or word "Tao" has a great number of meanings, and that in Confucius's work "Chung Yung" it does as a matter of fact mean "Way"; but in a hundred other instances it means: "speech, expression, a saying." Lao-Tse having, in one sentence, used this sign in two different senses, nearly all translators have suffered themselves to be misled. The sentence is as simple as possible, and in two of my Chinese editions the commentators put: "spoken", and: "by word of mouth". But of all the sinologues only Wells Williams has translated this sentence well, namely thus: "The Tao which can be expressed is not the eternal Tao." Although the construction of the phrase is not accurately rendered, at any rate Williams has grasped the meaning.

After my work had already appeared in the periodical "De Gids", I saw for the first time Professor de Groot's work "Jaarlijksche feesten en gebruiken der Emoy Chineezen", from which I gathered that he agreed with me in so far as to say also that "Tao" was untranslatable — a sub-lying conception "for which the Chinese philosopher himself could find no name, and which he consequently stamped with the word "Tao". Professor de Groot adds: "If one translates this word by 'the universal soul of

Nature', 'the allpervading energy of nature', or merely by the word 'Nature' itself, one will surely not be far from the philosopher's meaning."

Although the term holds for me something still higher, yet I find Professor de Groot's conception of it the most sympathetic of all those known to me.

5. p. 11. This "Wu-Wei" — untranslatable as it is in fact — has been rendered by these sinologues into "*inaction*" — as though it signified idleness, inertia. It most certainly does not signify idleness, however, but rather *action*, activity — that is to say: "inactivity of the perverted, unnatural passions and desires", but "activity in the sense of natural movement proceeding from Tao." Thus, in the "Nan Hwa King" we find the following: "The heavens and the earth do nothing" (in the evil sense) "and" (yet) "there is nothing which they do not do." The whole of nature consists in "Wu-Wei", in natural, from-Tao-emanating movement. By translating Wu-Wei into "inaction" the sinologues have arrived at the exact opposite of the meaning of the Chinese text.

Lao-Tse himself does not dilate further upon the subject. What follows here is my own conception of the text. The whole first chapter of the original occupies only one page in the book, and contains only 59 characters. If testifies to Lao-Tse's wonderful subtlety and terseness of language that he was able in so few words to say so much.

6. p. 12. This sentence is translated from the "Tao-Teh-King" (Chapter II).

7. p. 12. From the 56th. Chapter. This sentence is also to be found in 15th. Chapter of the "Nan Hwa King."

8. p. 17. This runs somewhat as follows in the 6th. chapter of the Nan Hwa King: "The true men of the early ages

slept dreamlessly, and were conscious of self without care."

9. p. 19. This episode is translated from the 18th. section of the "Nan Hwa King." By the "Great House" Chuang-Tse meant, of course, the universe, and this expression "house" lends to the passage a touch of familiar intimacy, as though Chuang-Tse had the feeling that the dead one were well cared-for, as though within the shelter of a house. — H. Giles, who renders it "Eternity", which does not appear at all in the Chinese text, loses by his translation the confiding element which makes Chuang-Tse's speech so touching. (Compare "Chuang Tsy" by H. Giles, London, Bernard Quaritch, 1889). The actual words are: "Ku Shih" = Great House.

10. p. 21. In almost all the temples is a chamber in which the Mandarins lodge, and where Western travellers may usually stay for the night, and probably for longer periods.

11. p. 25. The following, to the end of the sentence: "Poetry is the sound of the heart", has been translated by me from a preface by Ong Giao Ki to his edition of the Poetry of the Tang-Dynasty. Ong Giao Ki lived in the first half of the 18th. century.

12. p. 35. The Chinese do really preserve their treasures in this careful manner. It is usual for an antique figure of Buddha to lie in a silk-lined shrine, the shrine in a wooden chest, and the chest in a cloth. It is unpacked upon great occasions.

13. p. 35. Such a figure as the above-described is not a mere figment of the author's imagination — such figures really exist. A similar one is in the possession of the author.

14. p. 36. The Soul-Pearl "Durmâ".

15. p. 38. The figure in the author's possession is by Tan Wei. Another great artist was Ho Chao Tsung, of certain

figures by whom I have also, with very great trouble, become possessed. These names are well-known to every artist, but I have endeavoured in vain to discover anything nearer with regard to them. They became famous after death; but they had lived in such simplicity and oblivion, that now not even their birthplace is remembered. One hears conjectures, but I could arrive at no certainty.

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